

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, June 13, 1895, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. 10 rue Nitot, Paris. June 13th 1895. My darling Alec:

Your letter acknowledging receipt of my first letters came this evening. This is the 12th June, my Paris letter was I think written May 12th, so you were exactly right in calculating that it would take one month for me to write and receive an answer. Still though it is a long time I should have been glad of answers to some at least of my questions. I did not realize that Cape Breton was so much further from Paris than Washington. Since however it takes too long for you to answer my questions it must of course take too long for me to answer yours! So I hope that you have decided already whether it is worth while to perpetuate Buff's markings among your flock! That was a mean joke Mr. McCurdy played you about John McCurdy's "black and white two-nippled male!" I can see the whole scene, your disappointment, hard and earnest work, your showing it to Mr. McCurdy, his letting you exhaust yourself in theories to account for it, and then quietly upsetting them all so signally!

But you poor fellow, it is too dreadful to think of you all alone in the great house with not even the Grand Mogul to bear you company. Has he deserted you altogether? I fear you will feel very lonely, I shan't mind so much if it brings you over. I begin to feel that I would like you to come and take the children for a little trip, even if Mamma comes, because of the good it will do them to be with you. I am so sure that a few weeks with them in this way would be worth more than being with them all next winter.

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Today was the Fête Dieu or Corpus Christi day, I don't know which, or whether they are both the same. Anyway the celebration of the fête was the prettiest sight I have seen for

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a long time. At four o'clock all the doors except the great door of the Convent on the Rue de Lubeck were closed, and all the inhabitants, nuns, children and pensionaires together with a large number of invited guests repaired to the pretty white walled chapel. Presently the afternoon sun was shining down upon the bowed heads of white veiled children and nuns and even touching up the bits of color in the priests' robes as they officiated before the flower-decked altar. All the candles, and I counted a hundred of them were lighted and presently more lighted candles were brought in and distributed among the nuns. Then the command to march was given and the children streamed out by two's, the smallest first and tallest last, and took their way slowly along the garden paths among the cherry trees and flowers and horse-chestnut trees. Some of the elder girls carried a big white satin banner. Behind them in two long single files, one on each side of the path walked the purple robed nuns carrying their candles and singing and followed by all the rest of the congregation. The procession was so long that its head had reached the other side of the garden say three hundred yards away while the end still lingered by the Chapel door. There was a pause during which four of the smallest and prettiest of the children headed by another a little taller, and carrying large baskets of flower leaves on their arms, took up position between the last of the two files. Out from the Chapel door came first two or three tiny boys in scarlet and white 3 then bigger ones swinging censers, and behind them two priests in beautiful robes of white satin with borders beautifully embroidered in gold and color. Next a group of gentlemen bearing a white satin canopy under which walked a grey-haired abbe, the Holy Eucharist in his arms. As this passed us all fell on their knees on the grass and the little girls with flowers kneeling before the Eucharist scattered flowers on the ground. Up through the long files walked the priests preceded by the little girl who ever and anon turned to kneel and scatter rose leaves. Meanwhile the head of the procession had reached a beautiful high altar which had been erected at the end of the garden under the horse-chestnuts, and covered with immense quantities of beautiful fresh flowers and candles. Around it the purple-robed nuns with their long tapers had grouped themselves and behind and beside were the white-robed and veiled children, and beyond the crowd. Through it came the priest the people kneeling as the Holy Eucharist passed them and

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rested at last on the altar. Then came the four little flower girls and emptied their baskets before the altar, the censers swung, the nuns sang, the priests bowed and moved before the altar and the sun shone and the cool breezes stirred the leaves two and fro and all was most beautiful. I thought the service all too short and was sorry when the priest reassumed his white satin scarf, took up the sacred golden cup and the gentlemen brought forward the canopy and the nuns and children took up again their line of march back to the Chapel. There the service was continued with organ and violin accompaniment, but finally all was over, and returning through the vestry we saw tempting plates of rich red cherries, chocolates and cakes standing for the priests I suppose, and on the chairs tiny scarlet garments and beside them some very pretty and very stylish little boys in sailor suits who had evidently come out of them; indeed one little fellow was still being manipulated by the deft fingers of a gentle-faced little nun. There was something so gentle and motherly in the way this woman self-doomed never to be a mother touched the child, that I lingered over the little group. Yet there can be nothing forced or hasty in the taking of their irrevocable vows by these nuns, for their novitiate lasts for five years divided into two or three periods of probation after which the novice has to return to the world for a time. The final ceremony is a very solemn one, the funeral service being read over the novice and the pall covering her body, after which she rises a nun.

I had a nice little compliment from Daisy tonight. She said "I always liked to look at you but I never knew before how very pretty you are until lately Mummie Darling." I have committed a great extravagance, I have bought a pale blue silk matinee in other words dressing gown. I haven't had anything so pretty in my life of the kind and I do want to look nice even if only my little girls see me. But my good looks won't last if I stay up writing to you much later, so goodnight. I think, think of you constantly and wish I could be with you and in Beinn Bhreagh.

I think the children are beginning to show the work that they are doing.

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Ever lovingly, Your May. This is Friday afternoon. The children have been working 5 pretty steadily all day long. First French at the Convent, then singing and practising and writing French, and all the afternoon studying or writing in French. Now they have gone to another Convent lesson and afterward Mademoiselle Fillipi comes to walk with them until dinner time. They work pretty well. Mrs. Mauro and her family took afternoon tea with us after the Chapel services yesterday. She is going to Brabazon with me to see if we can find French families there for the children when we leave here. I would like them to have some time alone with French people as you wished, and think they will do better next month than they could have done at first and will be less homesick. They are very happy now.